

## Consul General Op-Ed for Global Entrepreneurship Week

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Anyone looking to start a business is, by definition, looking to the future. It might begin with a vague idea. Then some of those vague ideas are transformed into a real business – a startup company. And six months later, or maybe a year later, that startup may become an established business. Then that startup could offer jobs to some of the many smart, motivated Palestinians all across the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza who are also looking to the future.

Today is the final day of Global Entrepreneurship Week 2014 – a worldwide celebration of the innovators and job creators who launch businesses, grow the world economy and create a brighter economic future for all nations. During my time at the American Consulate General in Jerusalem, I have seen that the spirit of entrepreneurship is thriving among young Palestinians. And we at the Consulate General are determined to support that spirit – to give it the resources it needs to truly flourish.

This week, we sent 15 Palestinians to the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Marrakesh, Morocco. They were one of the largest delegations at the three-day event. The youngest members of the Palestinian delegation –Mohamed Hasarma, 15, and Omar Besthwawi, 16 – were two of the top performers in the Consulate General-funded Science Technology and Entrepreneurship Program (STEP), a nationwide competition organized by Al-Nayzak.

The delegation also included seven Palestinians from Gaza, among them Mariam Abed Abu Eatwi, the founder of a social media network for taxi services in Gaza. Mariam was a star participant in another Consulate General-supported program: the Palestinian House in Silicon Valley.

On Thursday evening, at the opening of the “Ramallah Startup Weekend,” I announced that the Consulate General would be providing \$290,000 in funding for a second year of the Palestinian House program, which gives some of the best and brightest of the West Bank and Gaza a chance to go to California to learn what it takes to start a successful tech startup and compete in the global market.

We also announced \$300,000 in support for a joint-program between Indiana University in the United States and Bethlehem University. Over the next 18 months, MBA students from Indiana University will work with business students at Bethlehem University to provide consulting services for Palestinian businesses that

have the potential to grow. Indiana University will also work with PPU in Hebron to support the university's business incubator. And we have also partnered with chambers of commerce in Halhoul and Jenin to support training programs for women with small businesses and for young people who want to become entrepreneurs.

The U.S. government's Middle East Partnership Initiative has teamed up with Nisaa FM to produce the "Fee alRiyada" radio program, which highlights Palestinian women entrepreneurs.

Everywhere in the world, it is the private sector - not the government - that is the engine for economic growth. Building business and creating jobs means more people can live a dignified life.

At last year's Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which was held in Malaysia, Secretary of State Kerry said that supporting creativity and persistence is a key part of the American foreign policy agenda. That is just as true today. The American Consulate General in Jerusalem is eager to continue supporting the growth of the Palestinian private sector, to encourage Palestinian economic growth and the creation of new jobs.

At times like those we're living through now, it gives me great hope to know we're able to work with young Palestinian entrepreneurs who are looking to the future. We can help them to succeed in ways that will not only benefit them and their families. The goal is to bring a brighter future to Palestinian society.